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ABSTRACT

In the future, elementary and secondary schools must regard their role as including tasks beyond educating individual students. Schools will have to provide certain functions which were traditionally provided by the home and the community. Based on this premise, there are implications for the functioning of schools and for the kinds of data needed to evaluate school effectiveness and to guide school policy. When a society changes outside the school, it is necessary for the schools to change, also. School success has traditionally been associated with strong families and strong communities. Changing social situations have lessened the community's ability to provide support for the schools; therefore, schools must modify their activities. Schools can either strengthen and rebuild the supporting social structures, by increasing parental involvement and strengthening community structure, or they can provide school activities which build compensatory social structures. Implications for data collection by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) involve measuring social structure and its relation to school; measuring school policies relevant to social structure; and using NCES data to augment parental resources. (A few comments on the National Longitudinal Study of High School Seniors and the High School and Beyond Study are included). (GDC)

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DATA NEEDS FOR SCHOOL POLICY IN THE NEXT DECADE

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Prologue

Because there will likely be extensive redundancy in the recommendations made to NCES by various educational researchers, policy makers and interested parties, and because much of what I would write were I to be comprehensive would merely increase the redundancy, I have chosen not to be comprehensive. Instead, in Part I of the paper, I have focussed on a single kind of problem, one for which I believe there will be little redundancy with other recommendations. I do so not primarily to increase the distinct information my paper will transmit, but primarily to focus the attention of NCES on a very important set of prospective problems in education, and on the importance of a body of data relevant to those problems. Because of the importance of the problem to be discussed in this paper, I believe these measures will show strong effects on school outcomes. In addition, the measures focus on matters which are directly subject to policy intervention.

After Part I, which addresses this single problem, I will address in a Part II some additional points, only loosely related to the first and to one another, concerning NCES data collection activities. Because these points are somewhat disparate, I have separated them off into a Part II.

Part I: The School, The Family, and the Community

Part I of this paper is based on a single premise: that in the decades to come, elementary and secondary schools (and pre-elementary schools as well) will be unable to function successfully unless they regard their task as something beyond that of educating the individual student. More specifically, the premise is that unless the school comes to provide certain functions that have been traditionally regarded as provided by the home and the community, it will be increasingly unsuccessful in its task. This premise is not based on a notion that schools should take on additional tasks such as "the teaching of values", or other tasks, but rather that in order for schools to succeed at their central task of educating children, they must approach this task quite differently than they have in the past.

The form this part of the paper will take is to first provide justification of this premise, second, to discuss some of its implications for the functioning of the school, and finally to indicate implications for the kind of data that will

be necessary to account for the degree of success of a school in its task, and to guide school policy.

Changes in society, and how they affect the school's task

My premise is that the success of schools in decades to come will depend on their being able to provide functions that have traditionally been the province of the community and the home. The premise is grounded in certain large-scale social changes that have taken place and are continuing to take place. It is these social changes which can defeat the goals of the school if the school continues to address these goals in the way schools have traditionally done. The proposition stated in its most general form is that in the presence of a changed social structure outside the school walls, the school itself must change if it is to accomplish the same goals it has pursued prior to the societal change. Stated in this way, the proposition is almost trivially true. It is the specifics which give informational content, and it is to those that I now turn.

I begin with the observation that schools have always been most successful with children from strong families. That has generally meant families from higher socio-economic status, families with a stronger educational background, and families in which the parents themselves provide a verbally rich environment. Consistent with this is the fact that younger children in a family achieve slightly less highly than does the oldest sibling, for it is the oldest sibling whose verbal environment as a young child has had the highest fraction of adults in its composition.

Schools have, however, not always been successful with children from well-educated and high socio-economic status families. Children from families disrupted by divorce do not do as well in school as children from intact families, and children from high socio-economic families in which the parents are inattentive or disorganized have traditionally been the "problem children" of elite boarding schools. At the other extreme, schools have often been successful with children from strong families in which the parents' education is limited. Schools were successful with many children of earlier generations from rural or immigrant backgrounds in which there was little education, but a high degree of interest in the children's education and a high degree of resolve to see children do well in school. Schools of today are successful for many children from poor families with limited parental education, when these families are strong and attentive to their children's success in school.

This leads to the second observation, that schools are more successful with children from strong communities than with children from disorganized or weak communities. The prototype of a strong community is the rural communities of a few

generations past and some (though not all) of the ethnic immigrant neighborhoods of a few generations past. In those communities, the social norms reinforcing school goals supplemented the family's own resources, and aided the success of children whose families might otherwise not have had sufficient resources to insure their child's success in school.

The prototype of the disorganized community is the ghetto of modern central cities, in which illicit and illegal activities distract children from the goals of the school as well as those of their families. In such communities, the social norms conflict with school goals, run counter to the family's aims and undermine the success of the children whose families might otherwise have had sufficient resources to insure their children's success in school.

But it is not only ghetto communities which can undermine children's success in school. Any community with a high proportion of disorganized families, or with parents whose attention is so fully directed to their own problems that they give little time to their children, generates norms destructive to children's success in school. A recent semi-autobiographical novel of a 20-year old young man who grew up in Beverly Hills (title: Less than Zero) is instructive. His description of the youth culture in that community of high income, high-status, well-educated families is a description of drugs, sex, violence, and self-destructive narcissism.

A third observation is that families in American society are becoming less strong with each generation, less able to provide their children with the kind of resources at home that their parents provided for them. Indicators of this are many: high and increasing divorce rates, which show no signs of declining to earlier levels, the replacement of family-wide leisure activities by adult social activities, "children's activities," and youth culture activities for which age-specific music both plays an important part and indicates the separateness. The increasing fraction of mothers of pre-school children in the labor force reduces the transmission of parental cognitive resources to children. A general shift of attention to the mass media of entertainment by family members of all ages helps undermine family values and attracts attention both of parents and children away from those intra-family activities that have traditionally aided the family and in doing so aided the school.

Finally, a fourth observation is that some of these same social changes, together with others, have greatly weakened the local adult community served by a school, and have largely destroyed those norms, and the sanctions accompanying them, upon which families and schools have in the past depended. In addition to the social changes described above that lead to family disorganization and parental inability to reinforce the school's goals, there is the major social change in which

fathers, and increasingly mothers, work outside the local community where their child attends school. This change, which takes parents out of the local community, removes the possibility of a strong set of community norms which can reinforce the school's goals. A complementary change has added to this effect, for in many places the schools too have moved out of the community. This has occurred in some places through school consolidation, in some places through school desegregation, and in some places through staff professionalization, which has moved teachers away from personal involvement in the community where they teach.

These four observations taken together point to the new challenges that have come to confront elementary and secondary schools, and will increasingly confront them in the future. Together, the first and third observations imply that schools will increasingly be populated by children from homes in which the resources that schools have depended on will be absent or not used in the service of school goals, and that schools pursuing their task as they have in the past will be less and less successful. Together, the second and fourth observations imply that the community surrounding a school will be decreasingly a support to the school's goals, increasingly an impediment, and that schools failing to modify their activities will find themselves with an increasingly unmanageable student population.

Implications for the successful functioning of a school

The changes I have described above leave children with less adult attention, less adult interest, and less adult control than has been true in the past. Schools which do nothing new will find themselves with children more psychologically isolated as well as with children more controlled by peers, commercial entertainment, and exploitative adults than in the past. To prevent this, I see two possible avenues for schools to pursue. One is to help strengthen and rebuild the social structures in home and community which have in part abandoned children to the school and to peers, and the other is to build compensating social structures as part of school activities.

The first of these strategies implies two tasks, one focussing on the home and the second focussing on the community. Stated quite generally, the first task is to involve parents in their children's education, a task which will result in greater expenditure of parental resources (such as attention and interest) on the child and the child's education than would otherwise be true. To carry out this task requires a shift in a direction opposite to that which schools and teachers have taken in recent years. It requires encouraging parents to become involved in the school, even at the cost of having to take parents' interest and demands into account. It requires removing the shield that many teachers and many schools have

used to keep out parental interference.

The matter may be put in terms of two diagrams, which, at the risk of oversimplifying can serve as a useful mnemonic. Figure 1A expresses the current form of relation between home, child and school in most communities, with the child as the only link, while Figure 1B expresses the form of relation that is necessary if the school is to successfully involve parents in their children's education and strengthen the home's capability of reinforcing school goals.

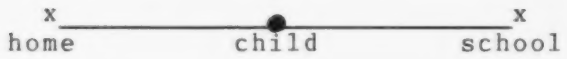

Figure 1A: School-Home Separation

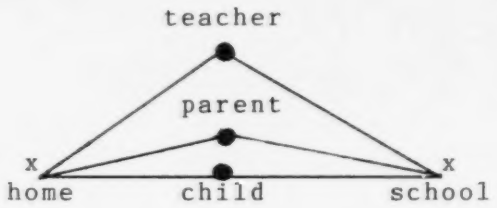

Figure 1B: School-Home Closure

Figure 1A is meant to denote a school-home relation which is entirely mediated by the child: The child has a relationship with parent within the context of the home, and with teachers within the context of the school, but these relations are separate and distinct. There is no linkage between school and home other than the child.

Figure 1B represents a situation I will describe as "school-home closure." It is meant to denote a school-home relation which is mediated not only by the child, but by either or both of two others: by the teacher, moving from the school into the home context, through home visits; and by the parent, moving from the home into the school context. For some parents who can or will spare little time for their children's schooling, this may mean only school visits or participation in school events. For others, it can mean involvement through volunteer services at the school.

Whatever the form of school-home closure, for the school of the future which pursues this strategy of strengthening the home environment, any of these activities should be accompanied by pedagogical activities from the school to the parent: Recognizing that many parents are cut off from those kinship and neighbor resources which can transmit information about the kinds of rules, practices, and facilities in the home that will help the child be successful in school, the school itself takes on the task of transmitting this information and encouraging the parent to use it.

The second task for a school which chooses the strategy of strengthening and rebuilding the home and community structures

is a task which focusses on community structure. The aim in strengthening the community structure is to facilitate the creation of a set of norms and accompanying sanctioning mechanisms in the community that will reward those activities of children and youth which are in the direction of goals of schools (and parents), and negatively sanction those activities of children and youth which go against goals of schools. This is an orientation that was more prevalent in communities when the school-and-neighborhood more often constituted a functional community than is true today. In the fractionated communities that are found in much of America today, the absence of school involvement with the community is merely one indicator of the general decline of the community. This is not to say, of course, that a "community school" orientation is not to be found in some American schools, for of course it is. The present point is that this orientation can be especially important in strengthening those communities that are unable to reinforce school goals.

At the risk of oversimplifying, the kind of community structure which is able to develop norms and apply sanctions reinforcing schools' and parents' goals for children, a contrast may be made between community structures with what I will call "intergenerational closure" and those without such closure.* Structures that exhibit this closure can be described as those in which friends and associates of a child's parents are also parents of the child's friends and associates. As in the case of school-home closure, intergenerational closure may be shown by comparing two diagrams. In the diagrams, the vertical lines represent parent-child links across generations, while the horizontal lines represent friendship and associational links within generation.

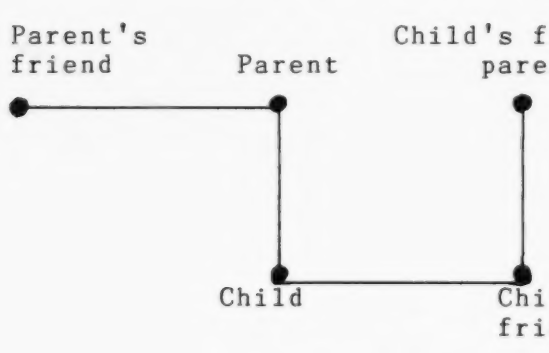

Figure 2A:
Intergenerational Separation

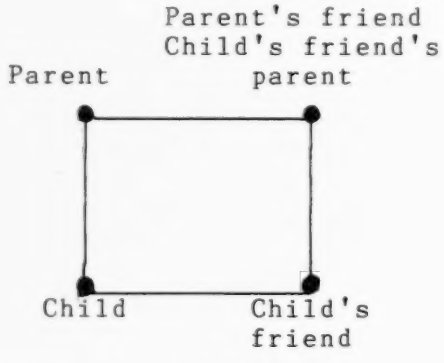

Figure 2B:
Intergenerational Closure

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*In "Schools and the Communities they Serve" (Phi Delta Kappan, April 1985), I examine this contrast in greater detail.

Figure 1A characterizes a social structure in which there is separation between the community of children, focussed around the school, and the networks of relations in which parents find their friends and associates. In communities where most families have both parents working outside the community, and others are single-parent families, many of the friendship and association relations will go outside the local community, and the social structure will approximate Figure 1A.

Figure 1B characterizes a social structure in which networks of relations which connect adults are largely coterminous with the community of children in the school. The intergenerational closure that results makes possible a flow of information among parents about children, and about school. This flow of information, in turn, facilitates the growth of norms and the application of sanctions by the community, both positive and negative, which shape children's behavior. Parents will discuss what is acceptable behavior and what is not, parents and children will be congratulated for achievements of the child, and parents are not afraid to sanction the behavior of children who are not their own.

If a school chooses the strategy of strengthening and rebuilding the social structure of the community in a way that reinforces school goals, it will do so through attempting to create structures like Figure 1B, where the structure is currently like Figure 1A. In short, it must create and strengthen relations among parents of children in the school if those relations are to sustain norms that strengthen the school's goals. There are a variety of ways this can occur. The most obvious are parent's associations and PTAs, organizations which many schools do little to foster except where they arise naturally (which is principally in communities with structures like Figure 1B, where they are least needed). In private schools and public schools which are attended by choice, parents are sometimes required to commit themselves to some school event or activity which involves working with other parents. In various schools, there are parent-sponsored activities such as auctions and bake sales. In addition, however, ad hoc parent's groups are sometimes formed at a time of crisis around some problem area, such as drug or alcohol abuse.

A second strategy for schools confronted with weak or disorganized families, or with weak or disorganized communities, or with both, is to build a compensating social structure through and around school activities themselves. This strategy can be found most fully pursued in boarding schools, many of whose children are present precisely because of family disorganization or parental desire to be freed from daily attention to children's schooling. The social order established in these boarding schools may range from the hierarchial form of an Eton to the communitarian and egalitarian form of a Summerhill or an Ecole d'Humanite. But whatever the form, it is

a social order, with norms, demands, and sanctions which surround its members, and which a school with a mimimum of sociological skill can shape. It is not a child-destructive social disorganization that exists in the larger society in the absence of strong families and strong communities.

Absent a boarding-school setting, schools beyond the lower elementary level may -- and many do -- attempt to capture the interest and involvement of children and youth through extra-curricular activities of various kinds. Many students whose unexceptional academic potential and lack of parental attention provides little incentive for intense involvement in school nevertheless do come to be intensively involved through some form of extra-curricular activity. In the presence of weakening community and family organization, some new pattern of extra-curricular activity may evolve in schools to bring a broader range of activities and interests, for a larger fraction of students, under the umbrella of school supervision.

In this section, I have described the implications for school functioning of the changing structure of the family and community for school functioning. In the next section, I will indicate some implications for data collection activities of NCES.

Implication for NCES data collection activities

The scenarios described above have various kinds of implications for NCES data collection activities. First are implications for new measurements that assess the kinds of social structural setting -- the kinds of family organization, the kinds of community organization, and the link between school and home and between school and community. Second are implications for measurement of school practices that act either to strengthen or to substitute for weakened home and community organization. Third are implications for ways in which NCES data activities themselves might augment parental resources, strengthening their capacity to aid their children's education.

Measuring the social structure and its relation to school: If the overall premise of this paper is true, data-gathering activities designed to provide information for school policy (like, for example, NCESs High School and Beyond) should obtain data that measures family characteristics, the school's relation to the family, community organization, and the school's relation to the community. Reasonably good measures of the first of these (which show strong relations to student performance) already are used in some NCES data-collection (e.g., High School and Beyond); it is the othe three that are largely missing.

The kind of data necessary can best be described by reference to Figures 1 and 2, for what is needed are measures of

the relations that differentiate Figure 1B from 1A, and 2B from 2A. None of these are characteristically measured in NCES data-collection, though in High School and Beyond, there is one measure that can aid in distinguishing 1B from 1A, both at the individual student level and at the school level. This measure, obtained only incidentally and so far not used in analysis of HS&B data, is a question in the teacher comment checklist asking for each student in the sample (after a question as to whether the teacher knows that student) whether the teacher knows the parent. This allows measurement of the degree to which there is some form of school-home closure, though it does not allow distinguishing whether the closure occurs through the teacher in the home context or through the parent in the school context (see Figure 1B).

Additional measures which would obtain information directly relevant to school-home closure and intergenerational closure have been absent from NCES data-collection, though they could easily be included in instruments of the sort already used. Information on both types of closure could be obtained in student questionnaires of the sort used in HS&B and the National Longitudinal Longitudinal Survey of 1972 High School Seniors. When there are in addition parents' questionnaires or interviews (as in a subsample in HS&B), then even more direct and reliable measures relevant to the structures shown in Figure 1 and 2 can be obtained. (It is surprising, in fact, that in the HS&B parents' questionnaire, neither information on the parent's involvement with the school nor information on the parent's involvement with parents of other children in the school were obtained.)

I will not go into the particularities of just what kinds of instruments and items may be most useful for obtaining the relevant data, for that is relatively straightforward. The essential point is the recognition of what kinds of data are at issue here, and the potential importance of such data for assessing the functioning of schools in the coming decades.

Measuring school policies and practices relevant to social structure: In the earlier section on implications for the successful functioning of a school, I have indicated some of the kinds of school policies and practices that schools have initiated, and others that can be initiated, to alleviate the harmful impact of changes in social structure. This is only a beginning. Exploratory ethnographic studies and pilot studies can be initiated to discover the full panoply of such policies and practices that exist in American schools. Once such information is at hand, it can provide the basis for instruments or items that can measure the extent of these policies and practices. What is essential now is, as in the measurements described in the previous section, that the kind of data under discussion is clear, and that the potential importance of such data for explaining the differential success of schools is

clear.

Use of NCES data activities to augment parental resources: In both the preceding sections, measurements were described which would have analytical value for policy-relevant research on school functioning. But there is another kind of value that NCES activities can have for the problems I have described. This is the encouragement and facilitation of parental and community use of information about student performance and school functioning.

Schools and school systems have been quite variable in both willingness to provide parents and the community they serve with data about student and school functioning, and their ability to provide such data. It was only through pressure from newspaper reporters that big-city school systems began to make public standardized achievement data at the school level. It was only Federal freedom-of-information legislation that gave parents rights to access to school records on their own children, and many schools discourage the use of these rights by parents. Yet this kind of discouragement is, if the premise on which this paper is based is correct, increasingly inimical to the successful functioning of the school. Parental resources, and interest in using these resources to benefit their child's education, can be amplified by free and easy access to information both about their children's progress and about the school's functioning. Community organization is more likely to be applied toward the improvement of education if facts which many school systems attempt to keep hidden (such as frequencies of various forms of violence, delinquency, and crime in the school, or the frequency of cutting classes or teachers' absence rates) were made public. An important role of NCES is to act, in effect, as a representative of the consumers of education with respect to information relevant to their interest. (In the past, NCES data services have been more use to education producers than consumers.) Some specific steps which can be of aid in this task are:

1. Publication of a booklet informing parents of their information rights vis a vis their children's schools, public and private, and giving information about how to interpret the usual items of information in school records. Such a booklet should indicate also information about school functioning that schools are required by state law to keep, or would normally keep as part of school management, with an indication of what kinds of information would, if parent groups can induce schools to make it public, be most valuable as indicators of school functioning (e.g., monthly teacher and student absence rates, yearly standardized achievement gains, dropout and transfer rates at each grade level).

2. Publication of material disseminated to school systems giving specifications for an appropriate system of provision of

consumer information, so that school districts that are so inclined will have a standard to turn to. Such a system can be designed to make use both of information required by the state department of education and of NAEP or NAEP-like information.

3. Design of a system of consumer information to accompany newly-introduced plans of school choice that states or school districts elect to introduce, either within the public school system or including non-public schools as well.

These are specific examples of the type of information services that NCES can provide and can stimulate which will have a direct effect in strengthening, not the family structure or community structure, but the ability of families and communities to support and aid their children's education. Schools have erroneously equated their comfortable insulation from parental and community pressures, and from the exercise of parental choice, with benefits to students. The educational establishment, NCES included, has done little to counter that self-serving action. But as the principal Federal information agency on education matters, NCES has both a responsibility and an opportunity to serve and protect the interests of consumers of educational services. This is the spirit of the large state-by-state comparison chart of educational inputs and outputs which NCES has just published. That spirit should be present in a much broader set of services, such as those described above, which can stimulate, encourage, and generate pressure for the opening up of information about school functioning to parents and community. Such services were less important when schools were closer to their communities, and when there were strong parental communities coterminous with communities of children and youth. But they are important now, and will become increasingly so in the future.

Part II

Included here are a few additional points about NCES data-collection and statistical activities.

1. The two major longitudinal studies of high school students, the National Longitudinal Study of High School Seniors of 1972, and High School and Beyond, covering high school seniors and sophomores in 1980, have proved to be extaordinarily fruitful longituidinal data bases - and have shown the value of the general design used by NCES in 1972 and improved in 1980. To continue to monitor the functioning of American high schools by continuing this series with subsequent cohorts is very important.

In addition, the experience gained from NLS-72 and HS&B, and the general value which these data bases have shown, should encourage the initiation of comparable series at lower grades of school. In general, it appears quite useful to concentrate NCES resources on obtaining and maintaining longitudinal data bases on comparable cohorts at periodic intervals, as in the case of NLS-72 and HS&B.

2. As part of the design of HS&B, an approach called "pluralistic policy research design" was used in modification of instrument and study design. (See "Policy Issues and Research Design," Report to NCES October 1979, by James Coleman, Virginia Bartot, Noah Lewin-Epstein, and Loraine Olson.) In this work, interested parties in education, most nongovernmental, and representing as wide a variety of interests as could be identified by examining testimony before legislative commitless on education bills, were given an opportunity for input to be used in modifying the survey design and instruments. A similar approach has been discussed by Anthony Bryk under the rubric of research design aided by stakeholder inputs. The same general orientation is evident in the current call for inputs by NCES, in which not only research investigators but also a wide range of groups with interests in education has been asked for input.

It would be wise to institutionalize such procedures for all research engaged in by NCES. If appropriately incorporated into research design, such a process can be very valuable, for neither research investigators nor government officials are in the best position to know what the emerging problems in education are. Appropriately institutionalized, such procedures become an important part of democratic processes in educational policy-making.

3. In the plans for HS&B, it was proposed to NCES by the contractor to establish an on-line HS&B data base, to make possible direct and immediate access to the data base. The data base was to be maintained either at the contractor's central

computer or that of NCES, and accessed via the educational computer network, EDJNET. Such an arrangement would have been especially valuable for those potential users whose problems, resources, and time were too small to justify obtaining public use tapes and going through the lengthy process of getting the data up, running, and able to deliver output.

NCES did not accept this proposal for dissemination and public use of HS&B data. Yet it is clear tht the time is at hand or very near for doing something like this with at least some NCES data bases. The hardware, software, and communications services are in place, so that the technologically outmoded means of disseminating NCES data (limited to printed publication or mailing of public use data tapes) can be augmented by electronic access. NCES could make its data exceedingly more useful, both for research purposes and for the wide range of other purposes that education information consumers have, by putting such a direct-access system in place - or as in the HS&B proposal, having it done by a contractor for one of its more widely-used data bases.

As promised at the beginning of Part II, the points contained here are a collection of disparate points, not connected, though I regard each as important in itself. It is, however, Part I of the paper, and the increasing importance of the outside social structure for school to which it draws attention, that I want to emphasize most strongly.